

Youth Disillusionment with Nationalism in Saput's "Meropani hoinara? yo desh" ("Isn't this country mine too?"): A Critique of Nepali National Identity

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Abstract

The main objective of this article is to explore youth disillusionment and the quest for national identity in Prakash Saput's song "Meropani hoinara? yo desh" ("Isn't this country mine too?"). The lyric of the song reveals the frustrations of young Nepalis who feel marginalized by the political system agonized with corruption and inequality. In particular, the youths articulate a profound sense of betrayal and alienation by questioning the ownership and belonging within their homeland. The article examines how Saput's song serves not only as a reflection of the current socio-political landscape but also as a powerful critique of the systemic failures that hinder the younger generation's aspirations. To examine this issue, the article has employed nationalism as a theoretical insight, especially the ideas of Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner and Anthony D Smith to be used for textual analysis. This article posits that "Meropani hoinara? yo desh" resonates as a call for recognition and change, urging everyone to acknowledge the contributions and potential of Nepali youths in shaping a more inclusive national identity.

Keywords: Youth disillusionment, nationalism, national identity, marginalization, social inequality, Nepali music etc.

Introduction

National identity plays a crucial role in shaping the experiences and aspirations of individuals within a nation. In Nepal, a country characterized by diverse cultures, languages, and socio-economic challenges, searching for a unified national identity has been complex and challenging. Prakash Saput's song "Meropani honiara? yo desh" ("Isn't This Country Mine Too?") is a distressing commentary on youths' disillusionment as they explore their identities in a rapidly changing socio-political landscape. This article is framed in nationalism theory to analyze the song's lyrics and explore how they reflect the youth's struggle for recognition and belonging in a society that often marginalizes their voices.

Prakash Saput has emerged as one of the most influential Nepali folk artists in recent years, blending traditional music with powerful social commentary. His songs resonate with the realities of life in Nepal, from economic struggles and political

disillusionment to issues of gender violence. This research explores his most impactful song, "Meropani hoina ra? yo desh" examining the intertwined issues of youth awareness, identity crisis, and nationalism. The significance of Saput's songs lies in their raw representation of contemporary Nepali life, where youths struggle with national identity, gender roles, and socio-economic challenges. This research projects its ray to the underlying message of these songs while situating them within the broader context of Nepali post-conflict society, where youth disenfranchisement and gender inequality persist.

The lyrics "Meropani hoinara? yo desh" resonate deeply with the frustrations of young people in Nepal. The recurring question, "Isn't this country mine too?" encapsulates a pervasive sense of alienation. Young Nepalis are habituated to the realities of a political system that often exploits their labor and aspirations, leaving them feeling like mere spectators in their own country. This disillusionment is compounded by economic instability and the lack of opportunities, provoking many to seek better prospects abroad.

From a nationalist perspective, this disillusionment can be understood as a failure of the state to fulfill its promise of inclusion and belonging. The youth's betrayal reflects a broader critique of the political structures perpetuating inequality and marginalization. As Anderson (1983) suggests, national identity is constructed through shared narratives and collective experiences. When young people feel excluded from these narratives, their connection to the nation becomes tenuous.

Anup Baral (2022) in *Nepal Music Review* describes Prakash Saput's song as a powerful expression of the frustrations experienced by Nepali youth. He emphasizes that the lyrics highlight the systemic neglect and corruption prevalent in society, leaving young people disillusioned and yearning for change. Baral describes the song as a sad reflection of the frustrations faced by Nepali youth. He notes, "The lyrics serve as a stark reminder of the systemic neglect and corruption that plague our society, leaving the younger generation disillusioned and desperate for change" (45). Similarly, Deepa Khadka (2023) in *Himilayn Sounds* emphasizes the song's nationalistic undertones, stating, "Saput effectively captures the sense of alienation many young Nepalis feel. The repetitive questioning of national belonging resonates deeply, making listeners ponder their own identities in this changing landscape" (32). According to Khadka, the song carries significant nationalistic themes, mainly through its portrayal of the alienation experienced by many young citizens. The recurring questions about national belonging deeply resonate with listeners, provoking them to reflect on their identities within a transforming society.

Smita Rathi (2023) in *Cultural Studies Journal* highlights the song's critique of political instability, stating, "The raw emotion in Saput's voice underscores the urgent need for accountability and reform in our governance, echoing the sentiments of

countless youth who seek a better future" (19). Rathi highlights the song's critique of political instability, noting that the intense emotion in Saput's voice emphasizes the urgent need for accountability and reform in governance. This sentiment reflects the desires of many young people striving for a better future. In contrast to the prevailing views expressed in the critiques of Saput's song, some interpretations may argue that the song's message is not solely a lamentation of the current political landscape or a critique of societal neglect. Instead, it could be seen as a call to action, encouraging the youth to actively engage in the political process rather than succumb to feelings of alienation and despair. This perspective posits that the song's emotional depth can catalyze empowerment, motivating young generations to reclaim their national identity and contribute to shaping their future. Rather than merely highlighting the urgency for reform, this interpretation underscores the potential for collective action and collaboration among the youth, suggesting that the frustrations articulated in the lyrics can galvanize a movement toward change rather than a passive acceptance of their circumstances. By framing the song as a stimulus for identity, nationalism, and youth's voice, this research is virgin territory to explore the dominant narrative of disillusionment and the possibility of transformation through active participation in the development and progress of the nation.

Nationalism as a Theoretical Perspective

Nationalism is a complex and multidimensional political, social, and cultural phenomenon that emphasizes the importance of national identity, shared culture, and collective belonging among a group of people. It often involves the pursuit of self-determination and sovereignty for a nation or ethnic group. Nationalism theory explores the origins, development, and impact of nationalism on societies and individuals. This research examines some theorists' views and contributions to understanding nationalism.

In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson (1983) argues that nations are socially constructed communities imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group. He posits that nationalism emerged in the context of modernity, facilitated by print capitalism, allowing for the dissemination of a shared national narrative. Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" emphasizes the role of culture and communication in fostering a sense of belonging among people who may never meet. He writes, "The nation is an imagined political community and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson, 1983, p. 6).

Ernest Gellner's (1983) work *Nations and Nationalism* focuses on the relationship between industrial society and nationalism. Gellner argues that nationalism is a product of modernity, emerging as a necessary condition for the social cohesion required in industrial societies. He asserts that nationalism is not merely a cultural phenomenon but a political one that arises from the need for a cohesive and mobile workforce. Gellner states, "Nationalism is primarily a political principle that holds that the political and national unit should be congruent" (Gellner, 1983, p. 1).

In *National Identity*, Anthony D. Smith (1991) critiques the reductionist views of nationalism proposed by Anderson and Gellner. Smith emphasizes the importance of pre-existing ethnic and cultural identities in the formation of nations. Smith posits that "national identity is not simply a modern invention but has deep historical roots" (Smith, 1991, p. 14). He argues that nationalism is rooted in a people's historical experiences and cultural heritage, which shapes their collective identity.

Saput's Song as Youths' Disillusioned Voices

Many songs serve as a powerful medium for expressing and shaping national identity. In "Yo Desh Meropani Hoinara?", for instance, Saput utilizes folk elements and contemporary styles to create a resonant narrative that speaks to the frustrations of the youth. The song's lyrics highlight individual experiences and collective sentiments of discontent. Through its widespread popularity, the song fosters a sense of solidarity among young listeners, reinforcing that their struggles are part of a larger national narrative.

The cultural production of Saput's present song contributes to forming a critical national consciousness. As Gellner (1983) notes, nationalism is often driven by the desire for a shared identity that transcends regional and cultural differences. In the context of Nepal, Saput's song unites diverse voices in a shared call for recognition and change, challenging the status quo and demanding a more inclusive national identity.

Saput's lyrics serve as a critique of the socio-political structures that enable corruption and inequality. By exposing the failures of the state, the song becomes a platform for advocating for change. The youth's frustrations are not just personal grievances but a collective demand for justice, accountability, and representation. It aligns with the nationalist imperative of creating a more equitable society that reflects the aspirations of all its citizens.

The song's powerful narrative gives voice to those whom societal norms have silenced. By addressing the apocalyptic nature of the issues faced by young youths, Saput challenges cultural and political complacency. The song functions as a form of resistance, urging listeners to confront their environment's realities and envision a different future.

Yahi deshko seema bhitra maile janm liyeñ
 Gorkhali ko santan bhani garv garya thieñ
 Janmaeko aamale ho ghas kaatdakaatdai
 Bauko jeevan yesaī gayo dukha saatdasaāt dai
 Hamlai ke nai sukh chha ra?
 Saknele gar, nasakne par, tara

Mero pani haina ra yo desh? Mero pani haina ra? (Saputh, 2021, 00.00.08)

Within the borders of this very country, I was born,

Proud to call myself a child of the Gorkhali.

My mother gave birth to me while cutting grass,

My father's life passed away sharing sorrows.

What happiness do we really have?

Those who can manage, do so; those who can't, fall behind, but—

Isn't this country mine too? Isn't it mine, too? (Our Translation)

In the opening of this song, the speaker reflects on their deep connection to Nepal, born "within the borders of this country" and proudly identifying as a descendant of the Gorkhali, a reference to the historically brave and energetic Gurkhas. The pride in heritage is palpable, yet the sense of hardship overshadows this pride. The imagery of the mother cutting grass and the father living a life burdened by sorrow paints a picture of relentless struggle. These lines evoke a generational suffering that persists, suggesting that despite the sacrifices made by their ancestors, the current generation still faces immense difficulties. The rhetorical question, "Mero pani haina ra yo desh?" (Isn't this my country too?), serves as a powerful critique of the exclusion the speaker feels. It questions their place and rights within a nation that seems to offer little in return for their loyalty and hard work. The refrain underscores a growing sense of disillusionment, where even the basic joys of life seem unattainable for ordinary citizens, highlighting the broader national struggle between personal identity and systemic neglect.

Samuel P. Huntington (2002) argues that cultural and political factors often shape national identity, particularly in contexts of instability. In this stanza, the speaker's sense of identity as a Gorkhali is complicated by the realities of suffering and neglect from the state. Huntington posits that when citizens perceive their government as corrupt or unresponsive, it can lead to disillusionment and a national identity crisis.

The pride in heritage coexists with a critique of the socio-economic conditions, suggesting a cultural fragmentation that may undermine national cohesion. Huntington's ideas about cultural identity and integration challenges resonate here as the speaker grapples with conflicting feelings of pride and disappointment.

The Formation of National Identity in Saput's Song

Acknowledging struggle and suffering reflects a broader discontent with political leadership and governance. Huntington suggests that a government's failure to address the needs and aspirations of its citizens can lead to a questioning of national allegiance. This aligns with the speaker's sentiments, as they confront the disconnect between their pride in national identity and the harsh realities of life in Nepal.

"Yahi deshko seema bhitra maile janm liyeñ" (I was born within the borders of this country), this line establishes a fundamental connection between the speaker and their

homeland, underscoring a sense of belonging and nationalism. According to Huntington, national identity is often tied to shared cultural and historical narratives. Here, the speaker's birth in Nepal symbolizes an inherent claim to national identity, reflecting Huntington's idea that national identity is closely linked to geographical and cultural boundaries. By the same token, the lyric "Gorkhali ko santaan bhani garv garya thieñ" (I took pride in being the child of Gorkhali) expresses a sense of pride in the cultural heritage associated with being Gorkhali. Huntington emphasizes that national identity can be a source of solidarity among people. In this context, the pride in one's heritage reinforces a collective identity among Nepalis, but it also hints at an expectation of recognition and respect from the state.

The line, "Janmaeko aamale ho ghas kaatdakaatdai" (My mother gave birth to me while cutting grass), highlights the struggles ordinary citizens face, particularly the labor and sacrifices made by women. It reflects the socio-economic challenges within Nepal, connecting to Huntington's notion that economic stability is crucial for national identity. The imagery of hard work and perseverance evokes a sense of shared struggle among citizens, which is central to the nationalist narrative but also emphasizes the harsh realities that many face. In the song's line, "Bauko jeevan yesāi gayo dukha saatdasaātdai" (My father's life also passed in suffering), Saput exposes generational suffering, which suggests a critique of the systemic issues that demonized the nation aligning with Huntington's assertion that political instability undermines national identity. The speaker's reflection on their father's hardships illustrates the cycle of despair, where personal suffering becomes emblematic of broader national issues, leading to a questioning of the state's role in ensuring the well-being of its citizens. Through the lens of Huntington's nationalism theory, this stanza serves as a poignant reflection of the complexities surrounding national identity in Nepal. It encapsulates the tension between cultural pride and the disillusionment stemming from political instability and socio-economic challenges. The speaker's experiences highlight the need for a government that acknowledges and addresses the struggles of its citizens, thereby fostering a more cohesive national identity. This analysis emphasizes the intricate relationship between personal experiences, cultural heritage, and the broader political situation, illustrating how these elements shape the discourse of nationalism in contemporary Nepal.

In the above stanza of the song "Meropani hona ra? Yo desh" the speaker reflects on their identity and connection to Nepal, expressing pride in being a Gorkhali, or a citizen of Nepal. However, this pride is juxtaposed with a sense of disillusionment and recognition of suffering within the context of national identity. Analyzing this stanza through the lens of Samuel P. Huntington's ideas on nationalism provides valuable insights into the complexities of identity in a politically unstable and culturally fragmented society.

It also reveals the issues of national identity, frustration, and disillusionment with the socio-economic conditions in Nepal. Analyzing this stanza through the lenses of

nationality and frustration exposes the speaker's deep-seated dissatisfaction with their homeland and the longing for a better life.

Gharakhet lagyo pehirole, chhaina khani anna
 Anna chhaina bhanne kura kata janu bhanna?
 Baru janm linparne Japan, German, China
 Nepal ma janm liye ra kahilyai sukh paina (Saputh, 2021, 00.02.03)
 Landslides have taken the lands and fields; there's no grain to eat.
 Where do we go to speak of this lack of food?
 Better if I'd been born in Japan, Germany, or China—
 Born in Nepal, I never found any happiness. (Our Translation)

In this stanza, the speaker expresses frustration with a broader crisis in Nepali nationalism. National identity is often constructed on ideals of prosperity, stability, and a shared sense of purpose among citizens. However, when individuals feel that their basic needs are unfulfilled and perceive their government as ineffective or corrupt, it can lead to feelings of alienation and dissatisfaction with their national identity.

The speaker's questioning of their place in Nepal reflects a disconnect between citizens and their government. The frustration expressed in the stanza highlights a sense of abandonment felt by the youth, who seek opportunities and a sense of belonging in a country that seems to overlook their potential and aspirations. By contrasting their situation with the perceived prosperity of other nations, the speaker engages in a form of comparative nationalism, where they assess their own national identity against others. This comparison amplifies feelings of frustration and inadequacy, leading to a questioning of what it means to be Nepali in a context of hardship and struggle.

The lines, "Gharakhet lagyo pehirole, chhaina khani anna" (Landslides have destroyed the fields, there is no food to eat) highlights the severe economic challenges faced by the speaker and, by extension, the broader Nepali society. The destruction of farmland due to landslides symbolizes natural disasters and systemic failures in governance and infrastructure. From a nationality perspective, this economic hardship threatens the national identity, as the ability to provide for Nepalese families is often tied to one's sense of belonging and pride in the nation.

"Anna chhaina bhanne kura kata janu bhanna?" (Where can one go when there is no food?), the rhetorical nature of this question reflects a deep frustration with the lack of options available to the speaker. It conveys a sense of helplessness and despair as individuals are forced to confront their inability to sustain themselves in their own country. This line underlines the failure of the state to provide basic necessities and creates a feeling of alienation among the youth, who are questioning their place within the national framework.

The song's line, "Baru janma linparne Japan, German, China" (Better to be born in Japan, Germany, or China), explicitly expresses the desire to escape to more prosperous and stable countries. The mention of these nations signifies a stark contrast between the opportunities available abroad and the hardships faced in Nepal. This longing for a different homeland reveals a national identity crisis, as the speaker feels their own country has failed them. This sentiment of wanting to belong to a different nation highlights a deep sense of frustration and betrayal as the youth see other countries as places where their potential could be realized. "Nepal ma janm liye ra kahilyai sukh paina" (Having been born in Nepal, I have never experienced happiness) encapsulates the overall sentiment of disillusionment. The speaker's assertion that they have never found happiness in their homeland underscores the emotional toll of Nepal's socio-economic conditions. It reflects a broader national frustration among the youth who feel neglected by the state and marginalized within their society. This sentiment indicates a growing divide between the ideals of national identity and the harsh realities citizens face.

The stanza poignantly captures the intertwining themes of nationality and frustration within the context of contemporary Nepal. The speaker's reflections on economic hardship, lack of opportunities, and the desire for escape illuminate the complex realities the youth face. Their expressions of disillusionment challenge the notions of national pride and identity, emphasizing the urgent need for systemic change to address the socio-economic struggles that undermine the well-being of citizens. This analysis underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing the frustrations of the youth in fostering a more inclusive and supportive national identity in Nepal.

The song highlights how the youths, despite being one of the country's most important resources, are often sidelined in matters of national importance. This exclusion fosters a sense of alienation and drives many young people to leave Nepal for better opportunities abroad. The lyrical narrative paints a picture of a youth caught between dreams of prosperity and the harsh reality of political corruption and economic stagnation. Saput articulates the concerns of a generation that has grown up in a post-conflict era but continues to suffer from its lingering effects. The youth's awareness, as depicted in this song, is both empowering and tragic. They are aware of their marginalization and the systemic issues plaguing the country but are simultaneously disillusioned by the lack of meaningful change. The song encapsulates the voice of a restless generation that seeks to redefine its role in shaping Nepal's future.

In this song, the idealism of youth is portrayed as being manipulated by politicians, who use their energy for political gains without providing substantial change. This commodification leads to a cyclical exploitation of youth enthusiasm, resulting in growing resentment and distrust in the political system. Similarly, the commodification theme extends to how the youth's aspirations are shaped by capitalist ideals, where success is measured by one's ability to escape the country and succeed abroad. The song critiques how the state commodifies youth labor, mainly through

migrant work, which has become one of the primary sources of income for the nation. Saput uses the song lyrics to question the morality of a system that profits from the labor of its youth while providing little in return in terms of opportunities or stability.

The commodification of youth dreams is not just a political issue but a societal one, as Saput points out how media and cultural narratives often glorify the idea of 'making it' abroad while neglecting the struggles and exploitation faced by these migrant workers. His music becomes a medium through which the complexities of these issues are explored, revealing the emotional and psychological toll that commodification takes on the youth.

The tension between those who feel included in the national narrative and those who feel excluded is central to the discussion of nationalism. The lyrics highlight the need for a more inclusive national identity that embraces all citizens, particularly those who feel marginalized. The distinction between "nagarik" (citizens) and "anagarik" (outsiders) emphasizes the importance of citizenship and the need for a collective identity that transcends socio-economic divides and it further aligns with nationalist views that advocate for the recognition of all citizens as integral parts of the national fabric. The longing for a "new Nepal" signifies a desire for a transformative national identity that reflects its citizens' values and aspirations. It echoes the idea in nationalism that nations are not static entities but dynamic, evolving constructs shaped by the needs and voices of their people. The last lines of the lyric highlight the perceived divide between the privileged elite and the ordinary citizens. The phrase suggests that those in power or with socio-economic advantages view the country positively, while others feel marginalized. In the song, the speaker evokes:

Taatho baatho manchhelai ta yo desh pheri sahi ho

Hami jasto nagarik ta anagarik bhaiyo

Kahile hola bhanne jasto naya Nepal auni?

Je-je bhā ni, jasto bhā ni desh kai maya launi (Saputh, 2021, 00.03.02)

For the clever and well-connected, this country is just fine;

But citizens like us are left feeling like foreigners.

Will there ever be a new Nepal, as we've hoped for so long?

No matter what happens or how it is, I'll still love my country. (Our Translation)

These lines express the alienation felt by ordinary citizens. By labeling themselves as "anagarik" (outsiders), the speaker encapsulates the feelings of exclusion and disconnection from the national identity. This sentiment of being marginalized within one's own country challenges the core tenets of nationalism, which typically advocate for collective identity and solidarity among all citizens. The feeling of being an outsider in one's own nation can lead to a crisis of national identity, as individuals question their place and worth within the broader national narrative.

The speaker's questioning of when a "new Nepal" will emerge suggests a desire for political and social reform that can address the people's grievances. From a nationalist perspective, this hope for change is crucial, as it indicates a belief in the potential for

the nation to evolve and improve. The desire for a new Nepal symbolizes the aspiration for a more inclusive, equitable society where all citizens, regardless of their background, can thrive and feel a sense of belonging.

Despite citizens' frustrations and challenges, there remains a deep-seated love for their country. This love is often rooted in cultural identity, heritage, and a shared history. However, the juxtaposition of love for the country with the expression of discontent highlights the duality of national identity. Nationalism is not always synonymous with unquestioning loyalty; it can also involve critical engagement with the state and a desire for reform to align the nation more closely with the ideals of justice, equity, and opportunity for all.

Analyzing the above stanza through a nationalist lens reveals the complexities of belonging and the aspirations of the citizens in a politically and socially challenging landscape. "Meropani hoina ra? Yo desh" presents a powerful narrative of youth disillusionment and the quest for identity in a nation marred by political instability and economic hardship. Saput's lyrics echo the frustrations of a generation that feels excluded from the political processes of their own country. The song poses a poignant question: *Is this country mine, too?*—a cry for recognition and belonging.

In conclusion, this song serves as a powerful reflection of the complexities of nationalism in Nepal. It articulates the challenges of alienation, the quest for inclusivity, and the yearning for change, all while maintaining a deep love for the country. Through this analysis, we see how the song critiques the current socio-political climate and expresses a hopeful vision for a more equitable and united Nepal, resonating with the fundamental ideals of nationalism that seek to bind citizens together in a shared identity and purpose.

Conclusion

Prakash Saput's "Meropani hoinara? Yo desh" captures the essence of youth disillusionment and the quest for national identity in contemporary Nepal. While researching through the lens of nationalism, the song reveals the complexities of belonging and the urgent need for systemic change. As young people suffer from feelings of alienation and betrayal, their voices resonate through cultural production, calling for a more inclusive and equitable society. The song serves not only as a reflection of their frustrations but also as a powerful anthem for a generation seeking recognition, justice, and a true sense of belonging within their homeland.

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